the ACTION reporter

American Council To Improve Our Neighborhoods

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"Talk Back" TV Aids Neighborhood Program

1,000 in "Viewing Posts" Study Urban Problems in Greater St. Louis Area

Even before the station sign-off is completed, one of the group switches off the television, faces the other viewers and opens a session devoted to "talking back to TV" by saying: "Now that we've heard our city's planning director outline the essentials for making zoning an effective tool in rehabilitating neighborhoods, what specific questions do we want to submit?"

The time is 8:30 of a Tuesday evening. The place is the living room of a home, or a church, or some other meeting place. The people are residents of St. Louis, and for the preceding half hour they have been tuned to KETC, the educational television station in that city, attentively watching and hearing a program called "Operation Greater St. Louis For Better Neighborhoods."

For the next half hour, these men and women will discuss intently the content of the program just heard. They will formulate questions raised by what the speaker or speakers have said in a professionally-conducted interview and for-

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A television program to which viewers can "talk back" in discussing better neighborhoods is illustrated in these photos. It is the "Operation Greater St. Louis" program originating every Tuesday night over Educational Television Station KETC on the campus of Washington University in St. Louis. The man standing at the right of the panel in the upper left photo is a courier from one of the "viewing posts" who has brought in the questions his group wants answered. The upper right photo shows one of the "viewing posts" deciding on what questions to submit after seeing the TV program. This group meets every Tuesday night in a church. So does the group shown below at the left. Other groups meet in homes. The lower right photo shows Dr. Eugene Johnson (second from right), coordinator of the program, with one of the viewing groups.

Coast Clinic Sets Attendance Record

With business leaders constituting the largest single category, attendance at ACTION's Pacific Coast Urban Renewal Clinic in Berkeley's Claremont Hotel October 17-18 set a new record. Registration totalled 285 men and women, representing 75 cities in 12 states.

There were 41 businessmen registered among the community leaders, who also represented officialdom, planners, citizen groups at both the community and neighborhood levels, and others. Attendance at four previous ACTION clinics totalled 800 persons, who represented 238 communities.

At Berkeley, as at the earlier sessions conducted by ACTION, those attending

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Joint Session Scheduled on Building's Role in Renewal

A joint national conference on "The Building Industry's Role in Urban Renewal" is announced by ACTION and the National Housing Center for March 17-18, 1958. The conference will be conducted in the National Housing Center in Washington, D. C., and is expected to draw attendance from all over the country.

Program details are being worked out together by the two sponsoring organizations, and will be published in future issues of The ACTION Reporter and elsewhere. Building phases of renewal projects will be emphasized in the program, which will be designed to assist members of the building industry to participate actively in local programs.

Purpose of the meeting will be to provide practical information about urban renewal activities. Especially emphasized will be the roles of builders, manufacturers, lenders, officials and other leaders.

Delegation Sets Record

Largest delegation from any city ever to attend an ACTION clinic was the group from Seattle, part of which is shown here. The delegation, numbering 17, was called together before the clinic by Mayor Gordon Clinton and urged to attend, to give impetus to the program Seattle is getting under way as a result of new enabling legislation in the State of Washington. At a pre-clinic caucus, the delegates — city officials, citizen group leaders and businessmen — set assignments to permit maximum workshop coverage. Back in Seattle, a report was made to the mayor by the two city councilmen in the delegation.

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mulate questions to be telephoned to the station or sent in by courier.

Panel Takes Over

At 9:30 P.M. — an hour after the initial half-hour program in which problems are discussed via the interview method — a panel of experts is presented on KETC for another half-hour, this time to answer the questions submitted by the people who are members of the more than 90 "viewing posts" scattered throughout the area.

"Viewing posts" are the groups of from six to 16 — the average is 12 — who meet regularly every Tuesday evening to "talk back" to this unique television program, which has as its slogan: "Only Better Neighborhoods Will Build a Greater St. Louis." Besides the more than 1,000 persons in the organized "posts," the program is attracting wide attention among St. Louisans, according to Dr. Eugene Johnson, director of television activities at Washington University in St. Louis.

Numerous Co-Sponsors

Sponsored by both Washington and St. Louis Universities, the program lists 61 additional co-sponsors, including community-wide and neighborhood organizadedicated to improvement and such others as YM and YWCA, public library, businesses, a number of religious groups, social welfare organizations, etc.

Long before the first TV program was scheduled — it is running every Tuesday evening from Oct. 1 through Nov. 26 — a thorough campaign was conducted among members of the many interested organizations in St. Louis. The program and its objectives were carefully explained and leadership was built up to insure widespread participation.

As early as August, a two-day conference for leaders was conducted at a resort, so the leaders could preview the TV series and complete plans for formation of "viewing posts." Participants in the neighborhood leadership conference were guests of the sponsors of the program. The leaders — called "hosts for posts" — received practical help and suggestions on establishing "viewing posts."

Experts on Panels

George Arms, a TV professional, conducts the interviews with officials and other experts. Panels for the question-answering or "talk back" portion of the programs are made up of carefully-selected experts in the various aspects of urban living covered in the programs.

Subjects of the nine programs scheduled cover: "Living Room — When neighbors disagree over the use of property, who decides and how?" "What Is A Neighborhood — and What's in it?" "Changing Scene — Is your neighborhood changing? Do you like what's happening and do you know why it's happening?" "Without Fear — How safe is your home? How safe are your streets? What can you do?" "A Common Ground — How to plan parks, shopping centers, other neighborhood facilities?" "Problem for Today — What do you want from your neighborhood school?" "The More We Get Together — How do you organize to get better neighborhoods, block units?" "A House Is To Live In — Remodeling your house and your yard." "Toast To The Town — neighborhoods that are going somewhere."

Follow-ups Featured

Follow-ups are special features of the TV program. Each week, Dr. Johnson and colleagues working on the program mail mimeographed information to leaders of "viewing posts." Included in these mailings are answers to questions the panel did not have time to answer the previous week, as well as information about the upcoming programs.

Other cities are watching the television experiment in St. Louis with increasing interest. This is especially true of citizen organizations in cities having educational television stations, although inquiries have come in from communities not so served.

"Principal advantage of the educational TV station, of course, is that it affords 'prime time' — in the evening, when it's most convenient for so many people to get together in efforts to improve their neighborhoods," says Dr. Johnson. "However, with sufficient interest indicated, citizen organizations likely could get television time from commercial stations for similar undertakings. If interest in neighborhoods continues to grow, the time may not be too far off when programs dedicated to this subject may be commercially sponsored by local interests."

Clinic's First Session

Opening session of ACTION's Pacific Coast Urban Renewal Clinic produced overflow crowd for visual presentation of "ABC's of Urban Renewal" by Robert F. Foeller, ACTION's technical manager. Some 35 communities expressed interest in buying copies of the visual presentation if it is found feasible for ACTION to reproduce it in a form readily usable by citizen groups. Such a presentation is being prepared for distribution.

"Clinic"

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took advantage of the opportunity represented by ACTION's assembly of experts to question these specialists on a person-to-person basis regarding problems in their respective communities.

Ten workshop sessions conducted both days of the clinic generated lively discussions. These "what-to-do" and "how-to-do-it" sessions stressed the financing and expediting of local renewal programs. There were also three general sessions (for excerpts from principal speeches, see "Reading for Renewal," page 4.)

Manual For Setting up Local Clinics is Offered

As a result of ACTION's five regional urban renewal clinics, several cities have requested assistance in planning local urban renewal conferences. A step-by-step manual, specifying program, format, content and promotion, has been prepared by ACTION. The manual also spells out how ACTION will help local leaders stage their local conference. Write to ACTION for a free copy of "Why Don't You Hold an Urban Renewal Conference?"

Insurance Awards Will Include Renewal

"Organizations devoted to community rehabilitation or redevelopment are naturals for Life Underwriters' Association projects," says the Institute of Life Insurance in announcing that for the second consecutive year urban renewal activities will be among the projects insurance men and women can use in competing for awards in the Annual Public Service Award Program of the Institute of Life Insurance and the National Association of Life Underwriters.

Local and neighborhood citizen organizations likely will be quick to enroll the life insurance men and women in their areas by:

Holding special meetings for life insurance people to point up specific contributions they can make to the local program
Recruiting known leaders among them for special projects.

Open to all life underwriters' associations, the competition for awards will be judged by a national committee of distinguished health and welfare and insurance leaders, according to Dr. Louis I. Dublin, consultant, health and welfare, of the Institute.

ACTION's Group Correspondents are being sent copies of the announcement which emphasizes that "many American communities have grown so fast that they are suffering growing pains — school shortages, traffic congestion, blighted areas, juvenile delinquency, etc."

In announcing this year's awards, Dr. Dublin said: "It is our hope that this year, in addition to participating in Community Chest drives, cancer crusades, and other health projects, life insurance men and women throughout the country will join community and neighborhood improvement groups and offer leadership toward achieving the goals of these groups."

Additional information may be obtained from local underwriters' associations, or from Dr. Dublin, Institute of Life Insurance, 488 Madison Avenue, New York, N. Y.

ACTION President to Speak at American Municipal Congress

San Francisco — Roy W. Johnson, New York, ACTION president and vice president of General Electric Company, will be one of the principal speakers at the American Municipal Association's 34th Annual Congress here, Dec. 1-4.

The theme of this year's AMA Congress will be "Human Needs in the Changing City," with the program focusing on the broad social and cultural responsibilities that city governments have to their citizens.

Bank to Use ACTION Booklet In Stressing New Loan Policy For Rehabilitation of Area

Newark — This booklet, distributed nationally by ACTION, will figure prominently in the Ironbound Community Council's improvement program, according to Martin Bergen, council vice president. As a result of the council's work in the neighborhood, The Port Newark branch of the National State Bank has decided to make repair loans, and to underscore this decision, will distribute 3,000 booklets. As others have done, the bank is obtaining the booklets from ACTION at a special reduced price with its name imprinted on the back cover as local distributor.

Realtors Urged to Join Local Renewal Efforts

Chicago — Realtors were urged to participate actively in neighborhood conservation and urban renewal programs "to expand their business," in an address delivered here by Walter S. Dayton, New York, chairman of the National Association of Real Estate Boards' Build America Better Council.

At NAREB's 50th annual convention, Mr. Dayton emphasized the business opportunities in rehabilitation, saying:

"In 1953, $6.5 billion was spent for residential rehabilitation and home repairs. Last year it was estimated that property owners spent $15 billion in this field. This means rehabilitation has become just as large an industry as new home construction."

Mr. Dayton predicted more and more families will turn to buying rehabilitated old houses as prices of new homes continue to rise, and added that every indication shows rehabilitation of older houses soon will be a larger dollar volume industry than construction of new homes.

City by City

SANGER, CALIF., — Working with the Redevelopment Agency of the City of Sanger, seven real estate firms are sponsoring local distribution of "You and Your Neighborhood," the 16-page pocket-size booklet ACTION is making available to businesses, chambers of commerce, citizen organizations and others at a special price. All seven real estate operators' names are listed on the back cover of the booklet as local sponsors.

CHICAGO — *"As Your Home Goes,"* a 14-minute 16 mm. sound film on home modernization and neighborhood improvement is announced by Sears, Roebuck & Company. The film is being offered on a free-loan basis to community organizations. Loan arrangements are to be made through Modern Talking Picture Service, Inc., 3 East 54th Street, New York 22, N. Y.

TUCSON, ARIZ., — Mayor Don Hummel of this city, who moderated the workshops on "Citizen Participation Through Organized Groups" at ACTION's Urban Renewal Clinic in Berkeley, California, was invited by the Retail Trade Bureau, affiliated with the Tucson Chamber of Commerce, to report on the Clinic. The Bureau issued the invitation to acquaint its members with national thinking regarding urban renewal in connection with Tucson's own program. Notice of the meeting to be addressed by Mayor Hummel read in part: "Tucson has taken the first step and it is important that all of us get behind the mayor's plans to clear out that slum area and make it a real asset to our downtown area and to our community."

NEWARK, N. J., — *"Newark Wakes Up."* is the title of an article in ARCHITECTURAL FORUM describing this city's urban renewal efforts. Newark, says the article, "has no sweeping transit proposal, no Golden Triangle or Penn Center or Courthouse Square. But it does have a whole miscellany of planning and building projects that begin to add up to a city on the move again." The article points out the first step came "when the city finally threw out the archaic commission form of government that had plagued it for 36 years and put in another, more modern form available to it under state law." Especially stressed is the cooperation between municipal government, business and citizens organizations.

(Reprints of the article are available free from ACTION).

Reading for renewal

Speeches

Six major addresses were delivered at ACTION's Pacific Coast Urban Renewal Clinic at Berkeley:

"The Businessman's Stake in Urban Renewal" — by Andrew Heiskell, publisher of LIFE Magazine and Chairman, ACTION Board of Directors. "Businessmen must decide whether they will be the victim of bad planning or the beneficiaries of good planning in our cities," Mr. Heiskell said, stressing the increasingly important role of business in the growing urban renewal movement. The publisher called upon businessmen to expand their planning to the community level, "instead of focusing only on their own businesses, so both can grow together."

"The Future of Urban Renewal" — was discussed by two speakers. Richard L. Steiner, Washington, D.C., commissioner of Urban Renewal Administration, called urban renewal's future "tremendous" and, after detailing progress of the Federal program through June 30, 1957, said: "Although overall accomplishment to date is substantial, it is small in comparison with the results we are sure to see in the years that lie ahead. Many cities are learning that their future prosperity, indeed their very solvency, will compel them to undertake renewal projects."

James Scheuer, New York, chairman, executive committee, City and Suburban Homes Company, called for a continuing Federal program . . . "to help American cities, towns and suburbs renew themselves and prepare for enormous population increases." He took sharp issue with "highest administration echelons which still view the entire urban renewal and housing program as a device for stabilizing the economy — a spigot to be turned on and off." He advocated that "the Federal government undertake an adequate level of 'pump-priming' and 'seed money' expenditures to assist cities in their basic planning and land acquisition programs. For these must come first, before the forces of free enterprise can be harnessed to a crash program of redevelopment."

"Economic Development and Urban Renewal" — by Robert H. Ryan, New York, director, area development, Committee for Economic Development. "Rebuilding our cities is not a question of a five-year plan or a 10-year program," Mr. Ryan said. "The struggle never ends to achieve the good life. We have reached a point in our growth when we must face the fact that our future economic progress may be determined by our ability to solve local and regional problems. The drag which could set in to our system could well be determined not so much by our ability to produce a man-made satellite, but by our ability to re-make our cities. Such symbols as two-car garages, two-shift schools, two hours sitting in cross-town traffic while gazing at two-generation slums are indicative of the fact that our very success is raising problems such as to dilute, if not negate, the rich promise of American life."

"Why Are We Here?" — by James E. Lash, New York, executive vice president, ACTION. "Urban renewal is more than merely a struggle for survival," Mr. Lash said. "The great and still-growing citizen-inspired movement to revitalize urban centers is a fight to flourish." He called for political, business and citizen organization leadership "to enable our cities to fulfill their purpose — serving people."

"The Housing Story in Pittsburgh Renaissance" — by J. Stanley Purnell, assistant to the President, T. Mellon & Sons, and chairman, board of directors, A.C.T.I.O.N.-Housing, Inc., Pittsburgh. Provision of decent homes in decent neighborhoods for all families, goal of Pittsburgh leaders in that city's latest post-war renaissance undertaking, is "a matter of good business," he said. "Poor housing hurts everyone in the community, and even those who live in good housing in our best neighborhoods cannot escape from the insidious effects of slums and slum living."

(Single copies of these speeches are available from ACTION).

National Publications

"ABC's of Urban Renewal," published by Sears, Roebuck & Company, offers basic material for citizen leaders. This illustrated booklet deals with terms and techniques used in fighting slums and blight.

"Operative Remodeling," published by U. S. Gypsum Company, is an illustrated guide of special interest to builders in home improvement work.

"Blueprint for Neighborhood Conservation," published by the Build America Better Council of the National Association of Real Estate Boards, is an illustrated booklet giving program for large-scale elimination of slums, blight and unfit housing conditions.

(Available from ACTION in quantities at no charge except shipping costs).

ACTION
American Council To Improve Our Neighborhoods
Box 462, Radio City Station, New York 20, N. Y.

Stanley B. Winters, Pres.
26 Shanley Ave.
Newark, N. J. D